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WASHINGTON (AP) - A NAVY PATROL PLANE WHICH VANISHED MORE THAN 25 YEARS AGO WAS ON A TOP SECRET INTELLIGENCE MISSION OFF SOVIET BALTIC TERRITORY, THE PENTAGON HAS DISCLOSED.

U.S. OFFICIALS ALSO SAY THEY HAVE NO REASON TO BELIEVE REPORTS THAT EIGHT OF THE 10 CREWMEN WERE PRISONERS IN SOVIET CAMPS.

AFTER THE PLANE AND ITS CREW DISAPPEARED ON APRIL 8, 1950, THE U.S. GOVERNMENT GAVE THE IMPRESSION THEY WERE ON A TRAINING FLIGHT FROM GERMANY TO DENMARK.

BUT A NAVY INVESTIGATING BOARD'S REPORT SHOWS THE FOUR-ENGINE PRIVATEER WAS ENGAGED IN WHAT WAS CALLED A "SPECIAL ELECTRONIC SEARCH PROJECT MISSION" APPROVED BY THE HIGHEST-RANKING U.S. ADMIRAL IN THE EASTERN ATLANTIC.

THE REPORT, WHICH WAS RECENTLY DECLASSIFIED AFTER BEING KEPT SECRET SINCE 1950, LENDS NO SUPPORT TO RECENT REPORTS THAT SOME OF THE NAVY CREWMEN MAY HAVE SURVIVED AND STILL BE ALIVE INSIDE RUSSIA.

NAVY OFFICIALS SAID THERE HAS BEEN "NO CREDIBLE EVIDENCE" FROM THAT DAY TO THIS THAT ANY OF THE CREW ESCAPED THE PLANE AND ENDED UP IN SOVIET PRISON CAMPS.

THE INVESTIGATING BOARD - WHICH WAS ABLE TO GATHER LITTLE HARD EVIDENCE - ACCEPTED RUSSIA'S OFFICIAL CLAIM THAT A SOVIET FIGHTER SHOT DOWN THE NAVY PLANE.

HOWEVER, THE NAVY DISPUTED THE RUSSIAN VERSION ON TWO KEY POINTS:

- THE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT SAID THE U.S. NAVY PLANE OPENED FIRE ON SOVIET AIRCRAFT. BUT THE BOARD SAID THE PLANE WAS UNARMED, EXCEPT FOR ONE .38 CALIBER REVOLVER NORMALLY CARRIED FOR SECURITY WHEN THE PLANE WAS PARKED ON AN AIRFIELD.

- THE RUSSIANS SAID THE NAVY PLANE WAS INTERCEPTED OVER SOVIET LAND. HOWEVER, NAVY WITNESSES TOLD THE BOARD THE PLANE WAS UNDER ORDERS TO STAY AT LEAST 20 MILES OFFSHORE FROM SOVIET TERRITORY, AND THE BOARD SAID "IT IS CONSIDERED MOST PROBABLE" THE U.S. AIRCRAFT WAS OVER THE BALTIC SEA WHEN ATTACKED.

NAVY INVESTIGATORS APPARENTLY BASED THEIR OPINION ON THE RECOVERY OF TWO LIFE RAFTS AND THE PLANE'S NOSE WHEEL FROM THE SEA, ALTHOUGH EXPERT WITNESSES TOLD INVESTIGATORS THE PRIVATEER COULD HAVE STRAYED OVER RUSSIAN TERRITORY IF ITS RADAR WAS OUT OF ORDER.

THE PRIVATEER'S DISAPPEARANCE WAS ONE OF NEARLY 20 COLD WAR INCIDENTS IN WHICH AMERICAN MILITARY PLANES AND HELICOPTERS WERE FIRED ON - AND SOMETIMES SHOT DOWN - BY SOVIET, COMMUNIST CHINESE OR NORTH KOREAN PLANES OVER WHAT THE UNITED STATES CONTENDED WERE INTERNATIONAL WATERS.

THE NAVY PLANE, WHICH TOOK OFF FROM WIESBADEN, WEST GERMANY, WAS SAID TO BE ON A COURSE THAT TOOK IT CLOSE TO TIGHTLY GUARDED AREAS WHERE SOVIET PATROL BOATS REPORTEDLY INTERCEPTED EVEN INNOCENT FISHING VESSELS.

THERE WERE UNOFFICIAL REPORTS AT THE TIME THAT THE SOVIETS WERE ANXIOUS TO HASK A NAVAL AND SUBMARINE BASE ON THE BALTIC COAST.

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SPY PLANE TAKE 2 310

WASH SPY PLANE BUT ADD: COAST

THE NAVY PRIVATEER WAS LAST HEARD FROM IN A ROUTINE RADIO CHECK WITH A U.S. MILITARY COMMUNICATIONS STATION AT BREMERHAVEN, GERMANY.

IT WAS DECLARED OVERDUE WHEN NAVY OFFICIALS CALCULATED IT HAD RUN OUT OF FUEL AND A WEEK-LONG SEARCH BEGAN.

THE INVESTIGATING BOARD RECEIVED TESTIMONY THAT U.S. PATROL PLANES WERE UNDER ORDERS TO RADIO AN IMMEDIATE SOS IF THEY MET HOSTILE ACTION. WITNESSES SAID NO SUCH SIGNALS WERE PICKED UP FROM THE PRIVATEER.

INTEREST IN THE MYSTERY WAS REKINDLED LAST WEEK WHEN JOHN NOBLE, ONCE A PRISONER IN A RUSSIAN LABOR CAMP, AND PRIVATE DETECTIVE THEODORE GREVERS SAID THEY BELIEVED AT LEAST EIGHT OF THE 10 NAVY CREWMEN MAY STILL BE ALIVE.

THEY CITED NO FIRST-HAND EVIDENCE, BUT QUOTED OTHER FORMER SOVIET PRISONERS.

THE SENATE INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE WAS SAID TO BE INTERESTED IN THE CASE. A SPOKESMAN FOR THE COMMITTEE SAID THAT CHAIRMAN FRANK CHURCH, D-IDAH0, HAD RECEIVED A LETTER CALLING ATTENTION TO THE CASE AND THAT A "POLITE RESPONSE" HAD BEEN SENT IN RETURN. THE SPOKESMAN SAID THE COMMITTEE STAFF WOULD LOOK INTO THE MATTER, BUT HE INDICATED NO MAJOR INVESTIGATION WAS PLANNED.

WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY RONALD NESSEN TOLD NEWSMEN THAT AS RECENTLY AS 1973 U.S. OFFICIALS HAD ASKED THE SOVIET UNION TO "PROVIDE WHATEVER INFORMATION IT COULD" ABOUT THE FATE OF THE FLIERS.

NESSEN SAID THE SOVIETS REPLIED IN JANUARY 1974 THAT THE AMERICAN NAVY MEN COULD NOT BE FOUND IN RUSSIA.

STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS SAID THEY HAVE REACHED THE CONCLUSION THAT THERE ARE NO U.S. MILITARY MEN IN PRISONS IN THE SOVIET UNION.

"UNLESS THERE IS SOME NEW EVIDENCE, AND I'M NOT AWARE THAT THERE IS ANY NEW EVIDENCE, THE UNITED STATES HAS NO WAY ADDITIONALLY TO PROCEED ON THE MATTER," NESSEN SAID.

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